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ABSTRACT

Curriculum development is the dynamic process of creating and modifying lesson plans, techniques, methods, approaches, and materials in response to educational program goals and community and student needs. It is not a static set of rules or procedures, lesson plans, or materials. The best curriculum responds effectively to student needs as a result of close cooperation between curriculum developer and classroom teachers. A complete curriculum development process involves several elements, including: philosophy reflecting program vision or direction; goals, objectives, and intended outcomes; assessment of student needs; subject-specific or general instructional approaches, methods, and techniques; a syllabus; lesson plans; materials and documents; and student progress assessment. Without curriculum development in an adult education program, very little education can take place except what can be provided by the individual teacher operating alone, frequently without training or much support. With a curriculum that is well-developed and constantly revised, teachers, students, scholars, and community members can work together for the benefit of all. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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27 April 1990

THOUGHTS ON CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN ADULT EDUCATION

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BACKGROUND

There is little agreement about the terminology surrounding curriculum development in the field of the Adult Education. The following thoughts are offered to assist curriculum developers and teachers in thinking about, designing, and producing curriculum for adult students. I will refer to "curriculum development" as the entire array of activities relating to the educational activity of a program.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Curriculum development is the dynamic process of creating and modifying lesson plans, techniques, methods, approaches, and materials in response to program goals and community and student needs. Curriculum development is a circular process of continually assessing and re-assessing effective techniques and student needs and making appropriate changes to the curriculum as a result. Curriculum development is a continual process. If curriculum stops changing in response to student needs, an educational program will quickly lose relevance and die.

WHAT CURRICULUM IS NOT

Curriculum is not a static set of rules, procedures, and lesson plans which a teacher must follow regardless of the situation in a particular class. Curriculum is not a set of materials which a teacher can pick up "off the shelf" and teach in the same way to any groups of students. Curriculum is not a linear process that flows from student needs to materials development to lesson planning to classroom presentation. Curriculum is not a mandated set of requirements established by a central agency to control and restrict the educational activities of local educators.

WHAT CURRICULUM IS

Curriculum is like a highway. It is the route, the direction, and the stops along the way to learning. Curriculum is what is taught in a subject area such as GED, ESL, or literacy. Curriculum is also a constantly changing set of documents, teaching materials, classroom aids, progress instruments, evaluations, and lesson plans that result from the process of curriculum development and classroom practice. The best curriculum is one that responds effectively to student needs as a result of close cooperation between the curriculum developer and the classroom teachers who are utilizing the curriculum materials in real-life classroom situations.

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ELEMENTS OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

A complete curriculum development process will include the following elements:

Philosophy - The philosophy of an educational program is an important context-setter for the development of curriculum. The philosophy includes superordinate goals which are not directly achievable, and which state a vision or direction for an educational endeavor. A philosophy statement for an adult education program may include comments about lifelong learning; the contribution education makes in an adult society; the relationship between work, productivity, and an educated workforce; the value of personal growth; and for some groups there may even be a statement about "service to humankind", service to family, service to community, and the like.

Goals, Objectives, Intended Outcomes - Goals and objectives are achievable. Goals are frequently broader or longer range targets while objectives are usually the steps for achieving the goals. For example, a goal would be to serve 100 adult ESL students and 200 ABE students during fiscal year 1990. An objective for this goal might be to have 50 students successfully complete the GED test during the year. Goals may also be stated in terms of changes. For example: to increase the average student attendance from 10 hours per week to 20 hours per week. An associated objective might be the introduction of an attendance policy and an awards program to honor persons with excellent attendance. Goals and objectives are powerful when stated in terms of time frames and individuals responsible. They should answer the questions: "By when and by whom?" Some examples: "To have each teacher complete 1 unit per week so that 10 units will be completed by the end of the term." "A new pre-GED curriculum will be developed by a select committee of teachers by the end of June 1990." "The Curriculum Coordinator will observe and give feedback to each teacher by December 1990." "Student performance on the BEST test will increase an average of 10 points for each 100 hours of attendance during the fiscal year."

Assessing Student Needs - If a program is to respond to student needs, it must have some system for identifying those needs, wants, and skills of the student. For many adult education programs, this assessment takes place during the intake process, when students are asked about their goals and given a test to determine their proficiency in the skills being taught. Common tests in use include the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), the Adult Basic Learning Exam (ABLE), the Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnostic (READ) test, and the California Adult Skills Assessment System (CASAS) tests. In the ESL area, the most common test is the Basic English Skills Test (BEST), along with a variety of short placement instruments sometimes developed by the program itself. A good teacher will frequently assess student needs through simple polling of the students from time to time, making adjustments as necessary. More generally, a program should be continually assessing community needs and problems on the job, at the police department, in the social service agencies. Frequently, curriculum can be developed that can help meet community needs. In a

workplace literacy situation, curriculum development should be preceded by a comprehensive assessment of the employer's and the employees' needs prior to designing a curriculum that meets those needs.

Approaches, Methods, Techniques - Although efforts abound to create clear distinctions between these terms, they are used more or less interchangeably in the field. The approaches, methods, and techniques utilized by an adult education program may be subject-specific, mandating a particular math technique such as the use of cuisiniere rods, or general, stating a preference for monolingual versus bilingual instruction. A comprehensive statement about approaches, methods, and techniques would include information about the mix of instruction in Basic Skills (grade level 0-5.9 literacy and math), pre-GED (grade level 6-8.9), and GED or Adult High School (grade level 9-12.9); ESL (MELT or CASAS student performance levels 0-7); and ungraded topic areas such as Citizenship, Drivers' Education, and Pre-Employability training.

In the Basic Skills and Literacy areas, a statement would include information about the Laubach or the Literacy Volunteers of America approaches. Terms such as "language experience" and "whole language teaching" would be included, along with comments about phonics, site vocabulary, and word attack skills.

In Pre-GED, GED, or Adult High School programs, a statement would include approaches for teaching communication skills, and problem solving, computational skills. Increasingly, programs are adopting a competency-based approach that organizes the teaching of these skill areas in terms of the life skill needs of students.

In English as a Second Language, a statement would identify an emphasis on speaking/listening (aural/oral) or reading/writing as the fundamental approach to teaching language, and whether the program is grammar-based, function-based, or competency-based. The use of grammar translation, Silent Way, Total Physical Response, or Superlearning would be described, to name only a few. The use of videotape and audiotape feedback techniques would be identified, along with the use of computers for instruction.

Syllabus - A syllabus shows the *order* of presentation of subjects and materials. It frequently is expressed in grid or chart form. It takes the goals and objectives and adds a specific progression of lessons. This is usually stated in terms of competencies, functions, or grammar points to be covered, including any major activities such as field trips or videotaping. The syllabus refers to units or pages in a textbook, along with specific teacher-made materials and *realia* utilized in the lessons.

Lesson Plans - Lesson plans are usually created by individual teachers. The purpose of a lesson plan is to combine the philosophy, goals, approaches, techniques, and syllabus with the needs of the students and the skills and preferences of the teacher to create learning for specific students in the classroom. Lesson plans show what will be covered, how it will be covered, using what specific techniques, materials, and classroom aids. A lesson plan answers the question: "What will be taught today and how will it

be taught?" Frequently, a program will collect lesson plans related to particular units of instruction in drawers that are organized to facilitate their use by subsequent generations of teachers. Teachers planning a lesson may go to the relevant drawer and find past lesson plans for ideas and past materials. Lesson plans can contain ideas for modifying particular textbooks to make a particular point. They can include teacher-made materials, charts, ideas for the use of *realia*, and so on.

Materials and Documents - A curriculum includes sets of materials and documents that support the educational process. These may include teacher sets of textbooks and teacher guides, classroom sets of textbooks for students, documents describing the use of particular text materials, ideas for the use of equipment such as computers or video cameras in the classroom, and perhaps even boxes of *realia* that may be used. Documents may include a curriculum guide, such as the Mainstream English Language Teaching curriculum guide (MELT), a curriculum statement which describes the overall program, a curriculum outline which includes the curriculum statement and the syllabus, and then the drawers full of lesson plans produced by previous teachers.

Assessing Student Progress - No discussion of curriculum development in adult education would be complete without mentioning student progress assessment. This is a very difficult area, given the realities of adult education, where many students simply leave class without completing a course of study and without taking a progress test. Nevertheless, the effort must be made and ways must be found to assess student progress.

There are three reasons for progress assessment: First, adult educators must be able to document that their programs are effective and producing the results desired by the students and the community. Second, and more importantly for students, there must be a means for making progress visible as they strive to achieve their educational and personal goals. And third, progress assessment is an important part of the feedback loop which provides information for modifying curriculum methods and materials to better meet student needs.

The most frequent means of assessing student progress is to give the student a series of teacher-made quizzes and to record satisfactory or unsatisfactory student performance on the quizzes as an indication that the student has learned the material. A more effective but time consuming method is to readminister a standardized test that the student has taken earlier to see if there has been improvement. Another method is to have a daily checklist of competencies or other teaching points that are checked off as the student progresses through the program. To make progress visible to the student, some programs post such checklists, sometimes in enlarged and simplified form, on the wall so that all students can see how they are doing. Celebrations and award ceremonies are an additional way to visibly acknowledge the fact that students are progressing.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum development is a process, not a static set of rules or materials. More specifically, curriculum development is a process of continually responding to student needs through education for the purpose of assisting students to realize their goals. Curriculum development includes assessment of student needs, design of curriculum, classroom teaching, redesign of curriculum, and assessing student progress. The best curriculum is the result of a partnership between the learner, the teacher, the curriculum developer, and the community.

Without curriculum development in an adult education program, very little education can take place except for what can be provided by the individual teacher operating alone and frequently without much training or support. With curriculum that is well-developed and constantly revised, the teacher and the student are part of a team of teachers, students, scholars, and members of the community who are working together for the mutual benefit of all.

Through the curriculum that we choose to develop and use, we cast our votes for the excellence of our educational services and we take our stand among the professional educators serving adults throughout the world.